



Red-cockaded Woodpecker: A Success Story

The Red-cockaded woodpecker (RCW) population at the Savannah River Site (SRS) is a growing success story with 53 groups of the birds found in 2010 compared to only one group found in 1985. The United States Department of Agriculture Forest Service-Savannah River (USFS-SR) manages the RCW recovery program at SRS while the bird is on the [Federal list of endangered species](#). The recovery program goal is adequate habitat at SRS to support 418 groups. This nestling, shown after being banded, is one of the newest members of this growing population.



Recovery of the RCW population at SRS represents an extreme challenge because much of the pine forest is too young to be considered suitable nesting habitat. Although we do not know the population of RCW groups prior to the establishment of SRS in 1950, we do know that the population declined to 4 birds in 3 clusters by 1985. A factor likely contributing to the population decline was a lack of suitable and potential cavity trees for nesting.

In 1986, the United States Department of Energy-Savannah River (DOE-SR) and USFS-SR committed to recovery to a viable population of RCWs on SRS by initiating a management plan. This plan emphasizes ecosystem-level RCW management that is compatible to DOE-SR missions. Savannah River Site established an RCW Habitat Management Area (HMA) of 34,832 hectares and a Supplemental RCW HMA of 19,493 hectares.

Within these Habitat Management Areas, USFS-SR has implemented numerous successful conservation strategies and technology in the recovery of the endangered woodpecker at Savannah River Site. USFS-SR inserts artificial nesting cavities, developed by the Forest Service [Southern Research Station](#), into living pine trees, supplementing the bird's efforts to construct a natural cavity. The success of large-scale translocations at SRS was a catalyst for regional translocations across the southeastern United States.

Our forest management options include forest thinning, removing midstory hardwoods within a 50 foot-radius of cavity trees, applying prescribed fire at least once every four years, selecting replacement stands for all active clusters of trees, selecting recruitment stands based on RCW population expansion direction, or maintaining foraging habitat within one-half mile of the cavity tree cluster. We monitor throughout the year to identify tree cluster status and membership and, during the breeding season, to measure the woodpeckers' reproduction rate. The current population of 53 groups is almost 200 birds.

For more information, contact the USFS-SR Assistant Manager for Natural Resources, 803.725.8713.

